

Study Committee on Adoption

*Wednesday, October 1, 2014 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.
Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room A*

Members present: Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Sharon Pierce, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

Guests present: Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

Commission staff present: Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Deputy Legislative Director.

- I. **Welcome and Introductions:** Jane Bisbee greets audience. Committee members introduce themselves and explain their roles. Jane reminds members and audience of Adoption Study Committee website and email address. Email address is adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov.
- II. **Approval of August 12, 2014 Meeting Minutes:** Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Motion made to approve minutes, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of August 12, 2014 approved.
- III. **Appointment of Deputy Chair:** Sharon Pierce and Karen Sauer volunteer to be Deputy Chair. Jane decides to have both serve as co-deputy chairs. Motion entertained for Adoption Study Committee to have co-deputy chairs. Motion made, passes committee vote, and motion carries.
- IV. **Update on State Adoption Subsidy:** Jane Bisbee introduces Tamara Wilson, DCS Deputy General Counsel. Jane makes reference to handouts (Frequently Asked Questions and Adoption Subsidy Press Release). Tamara Wilson states she has two matters to discuss. 1) Explained that DCS has been authorized to provide funding for state adoption subsidies for all children on the waitlist beginning July 1, 2014, as well as any children who may become eligible during state fiscal year 2015. Payments will be retroactive to July 1, 2014. DCS Central Eligibility Unit is currently processing families' information in order to get them into payment status. 2) Settlement has been reached in lawsuit. Will provide for the State paying \$15.1

million, which will be administered by a third party administrator. Will cover families with state adoption subsidy agreements on the waitlist from January 1, 2009, through June 30, 2014 (if approved by Court).

- V. **Specialty License Plate:** Alex Miller, Legislative Director for the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles, discusses specialty license plates and the process. Governed in IC 9-18-25-2.3. A group can submit an application for consideration for the next registration year. First available would be 2016. Once application is received, BMV will review and submit to legislature (Interim Study Committee on Roads and Transportation). Applications are not considered complete unless they meet all requirements in code. Once committee has applications, it have its own scoring method. Committee makes recommendations to accept or reject. Ultimately BMV makes final determination as to whether or not group gets specialty license plate. Per Indiana law, BMV cannot issue more than five new specialty plates in any given year. Committee gives recommendation on which groups are most relevant. It typically receives no more than ten to twelve applications per year. This year it had seven.

Short discussion on the fact that if committee decides to do this, there will be many more questions. Michelle Jackson suggests we assign this to someone to bring to next committee. Zac Kester agrees, but believes the group submitting application has to be a non-profit. Alex Miller says that we do have governmental agencies that have license plates (i.e. DCS Kids First Trust Fund). Sharon agrees to bring up question to Kids First Trust Fund Board at meeting on October 2, 2014. Motion made to further look into this issue and bring to next committee meeting for discussion purposes only. Motion approved by committee.

- VI. **Indiana Heart Gallery:** Amanda Lopez explains that the Heart Gallery is a traveling photo exhibit featuring children in foster care who are available for adoption. DCS started its Heart Gallery in 2007. Purpose is to raise awareness. As a State contractor (Transform Consulting) they try to get people to host this Heart Gallery. Last year averaged six to seven events per month. Hosted in all 18 DCS regions. Explains how children are featured in the Heart Gallery. Contractors work closely with DCS Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP) specialists. Family Case Managers (FCMs) can also make referral to have a child featured in Heart Gallery. Child must also agree that he or she wants to be adopted. Generally have 20-30 kids featured at one time. Further explained that the Heart Gallery website features a few children who are available for adoption, as well as the Heart Gallery tour. Events are also featured on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Continuously working with partners in the community, such as YMCA's, Boys and Girls Club, churches, etc.

- VII. Indiana Adoption Program:** Anna Wolak, Director of Adoption Recruitment with the Children's Bureau, explains that there are 20 Adoption Champions in the State of Indiana, at least one per region. They are contracted with the state to hold one event per region, per quarter. These events include PR events, educational events and National Adoption Day events. Further discussed their role and what they do. Not promoting any one state agency, just adoption in general. Invite groups of families and kids to "matching events". A big push in November is to show appreciation for those who have adopted. Invites committee members to private reception where Director Bonaventura is speaking on November 6, 2014, at the Children's Museum. Asks committee for contacts that might help get the word out about National Adoption Day events.
- VIII. Faith-Based Adoption Awareness Initiatives:** Angela Hall, Live 1:17 Ministry, Trader's Point Christian Church, discusses how their ministry came about. Comes from the biblical passage, Isaiah 1:17. The ministry exists to be a catalyst for adoption. Shares with the committee ways to promote awareness within the church. Their ministry is doing things within the church to raise awareness. They try to do a couple of educational sessions per year, mission trip, coffee sleeves for the first Sunday in November (promoting National Adoption Month), and provide a kiosk on site at the church with information to raise awareness. They are excited to see church families who can work with prevention efforts as well. Great resource for them to come, help, and learn. Their ministry is four years old and is part of the National Alliance.
- IX. Adoption Awareness Ideas:** Lindsey Craig, Director of Family Policy, Office of the Governor, discusses how important it is to the Governor that we partner with the faith-based communities with regard to adoption. She would love to do more outreach with the church community regarding "Orphan Sunday." Wants to promote all adoption. Faith-based community has the same "heart for kids" as the State. Wants to expand the partnership with faith-based community. The thought is that maybe you cannot adopt and you cannot foster, but you can support people who do/are. Targeting churches and congregations to "step up". Somehow figuring out a way to have that unified goal of adoption of kids in the DCS system. Discusses the success of the Virginia Adopts campaign. Announces that Governor Pence will host another adoption fair. The 2nd Annual Informational Adoption Fair will be held on November 10th, 2014.

Sharon Pierce discusses One Church, One Child of Illinois. If every church in our state embraced/supported a family adopting, then there would not be children waiting

for families, but families waiting for children. Sharon further notes concerns about disproportionality.

X. Adoptive Parents' Perspective on Adoption Awareness:

a. Michelle Jackson, *Committee Member*

When she thinks about adoption awareness, she thinks about advocacy. Gives statistics. Feels DCS is doing a good job. Thanks the Governor's Office for centralizing things, doing collaborative work, and bringing more awareness to this issue. Ideas include 1) Governor's Office being on a national platform with organizations such as Christian Alliance. Can we have someone from the Governor's Office present at some of these events and/or conferences? 2) Reaching out and collaborating with Licensed Child Placing Agencies, 3) Expanding our social media, 4) Using public radio/television to promote awareness, 5) Creation of a permanent advocacy committee, and 6) Promoting adoption awareness within our schools.

b. Zac Kester, *Committee Member*

Shares his family's personal story. He and his wife were always serious about adoption, and their Christian life is a reason they wanted to adopt. Discusses theological convictions. They recognized that they had a good home that they could open up to other children. Began process and adopted two daughters from Ethiopia. Suggests that committee could and should make recommendations regarding adoption awareness (specifically targeting people of faith) to think about adoption within the state system.

c. Karen Sauer, *Committee Member*

When she was young, she read a magazine article about kids aging out of the system. Her family wanted her to have a baby, suggesting that if she adopted she might "get a bad one". There are not bad kids, but instead kids who were in bad situations and taught bad things. People will realize that they are missing out on some amazing kids. Wants to change the fear and focus on success. The resource she wished existed when she was adopting is "networking". She thinks we should focus on the positives and success stories.

XI. Courtroom Adoption Day Events: Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2, discusses involvement in Adoption Day events. She and Judge Galvin sit on the Indiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Suggests that they talk to the

Council about putting adoption on the agenda for the Indiana Juvenile Judges Conference next June. Thinks the judiciary in Indiana is a hugely untapped resource. Need to get the word out to the judiciary, as we have easy allies in them. Discusses handout regarding free conference October 18th, 2014. Motion made on Judge Kenworthy and Judge Galvin discussing issue with Juvenile Court Judges. Passes committee vote and motion approved.

- XII. Committee Discussion on Adoption Awareness Strategies:** Jane invites audience to send input to the email address. Does anyone have any other suggestions on follow-up or recommendations on awareness?

Michelle Jackson makes motion to research the possibility of a permanent advocacy committee that primarily focuses on awareness that would be through the Governor's Office. Passes committee vote and approved.

Procedural question by Zac Kester regarding report submission to the Governor and Legislature. Jane suggests we will pull motions, strategies, and/or information from each meeting to create an initial draft report. Jane further suggests that we have an interim report for the next meeting saying what we have done so far and what we plan to do in the future. Staff will likely put this together and send to committee members in draft form.

- XIII. Discussion of Topics/Presenters for Next Committee Meeting on November 19, 2014 regarding "Barriers to Adoption":**

We are looking for "what are the barriers" and who can speak to the barriers?

- Sharon Pierce suggests **financial concerns and capacity** (to meet the needs of the child)
- Zac Kester suggests **mistrust or misunderstanding of state authorities.**
- Karen Sauer suggests **being single and what to expect when you adopt a special needs child.**
- Greg Ellis suggests **preparation of family to adopt and understanding of post adoption services.**

- XIV. Future Commission Meeting Dates:**

- **November 19, 2014 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- **January 14, 2015 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**

- **March 11, 2015** **10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**

Location TBD